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At Least 135 U.S. Agents Following Up Clues in Navy Spy Inquiry

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WASHINGTON, June 25 — The search for members of a Navy spy ring has turned into one of the largest espionage investigations in American history, involving more than 100 agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and more than a dozen bureau field offices, officials said today.

They said the investigation also included 35 Navy intelligence agents, Federal prosecutors on both coasts and several Justice Department employees. The investigators have followed up on leads that have taken them as far afield as Oklahoma and Louisiana.

Investigators say they have now turned to the second phase of their inquiry: a careful examination of the lives of John A. Walker Jr., 47 years old, a retired Navy chief warrant officer who is accused of recruiting others to help him spy, and three other men charged in the case. They are Mr. Walker's son, Michael L. Walker, 22; a brother, Arthur J. Walker, 50, and a friend, Jerry A. Whitworth, 45. All have pleaded not guilty.

"We're trying to reconstruct the lives of these people," said one official, who asked not to be named. "Where they worked, what they did, who they talked to. It's a very substantial investigation."

Two Decades of Military Records

The first part of the inquiry, officials said, was an attempt to round up those most recently and intimately involved in the spy ring. That effort led to the arrest of the four men.

Now the investigators say they are poring through two decades of military records and straining the memories of those who knew the Walker family, trying to piece together the lives of four men who are accused of involvement in one of the most damaging espionage operations in the nation's history.

With that information, they say the Government can track down others who may have been recruited by Mr.

Walker in his 20-year Navy career. Prosecutors have charged that much of that career was spent passing secret Navy documents to the Soviet Union.

High-ranking Federal officials have been saying for nearly a month that more arrests are expected. "I'd be very surprised if there weren't more arrests," a law-enforcement official who is close to the investigation said this week.

He said that agents have been struck by the aggressive efforts Mr. Walker is accused of using to recruit his relatives into the espionage operation.

Inquiry 'Will Take Months'

Investigators believe that Mr. Walker was so desperate to further his spy operation that he employed the same techniques with other friends and acquaintances, the official said. Greed was his motive, the bureau has said.

The official would not say when arrests would occur or where. "Be patient," he said, noting that the investigation "will take months."

A group of bureau affidavits has remained under seal in a court in Sacramento, Calif., for nearly a month, and it is thought that they may point to more suspects. The affidavits were filed when the bureau requested a judge's approval to search the property of Mr. Whitworth, described as Mr. Walker's closest friend.

Navy investigators say there has been close cooperation with the F.B.I.

"There has been full and complete cooperation and sharing of information among all parties," said Lieut. Stephen R. Pietropaoli, a Navy spokesman.

When Navy personnel must be questioned, it is done by Navy investigators. Interviews with civilians and retired Navy officers are usually handled by the bureau.

The investigators have closely scanned the military records of the men arrested so far. Michael Walker was a yeoman aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz until his arrest last month.

Mr. Whitworth and Arthur Walker were also retired from the Navy.

Investigators say they are using the records, which pinpoint the bases and vessels on which the four men served, to track down other Navy employees who worked with them closely.

"A lot of Navy installations are being looked at," said a Navy officer, who asked not to be named. He said the Navy was concentrating on people acquainted with John Walker. He has been described by family members as highly manipulative.

"We are tracking down people who worked with him," the official said. "We're not tracking down every person who had contact, but we are reaching out for a lot of people."

Officials had previously acknowledged that the investigation was active in California, where Mr. Walker and Mr. Whitworth were stationed as Navy communications specialists.

Bureau and Navy intelligence agents have also conducted interviews with Navy employees at two cities in Florida, Jacksonville and Pensacola, and in Norfolk, Va., headquarters of the Atlantic fleet. More recently, law-enforcement officials have said that the investigation has extended to New Orleans and parts of Oklahoma.

"That doesn't mean we have suspects there," one official said. "That means that some lead took us there with some questions. We are following up on all important leads. This thing is taking us all over the country."